

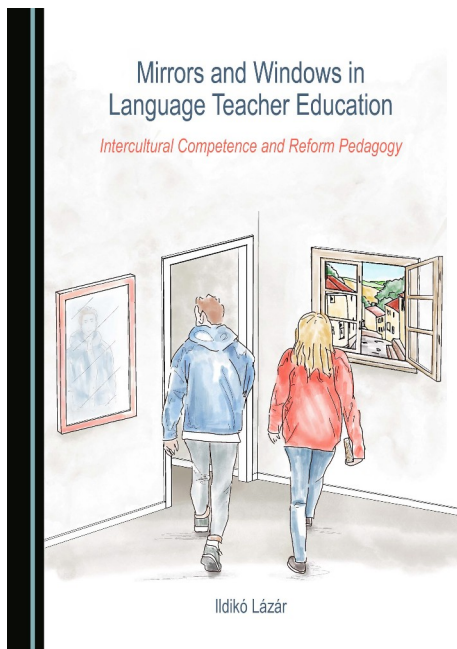
Ildikó Lázár (2022). *Mirrors and Windows in Language Teacher Education. Intercultural Competence and Reform Pedagogy*. Cambridge Scholar Publishing

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Seldom does it happen that a Hungarian scholar and teacher educator's book gets published in English by a British publisher. The fact that Ildikó Lázár's book was published in English abroad is because she is a widely acclaimed researcher of her field: intercultural communication, intercultural competence development, and language teacher education. Michael Byram, one of the most authoritative researchers of intercultural competence wrote the 'Foreword' to the book, which also proves that Ms. Lázár's work is held in high esteem by fellow scholars. In light of the aforesaid it is sad that this book is not available in Hungary, not even the English language edition,

let alone a Hungarian translation. It would be important to have it translated as the author consistently presents where Hungarian teacher education stands in terms of intercultural education and reform pedagogy against the backdrop of the international, mostly European context, and her research projects, also included in the final part of the book, were also partly conducted in Hungary. Thus this volume could be an important source for language teacher educators and for

teacher educators in general, as well as for researchers who work in this field, and, last but not least, for interested teachers and trainee teachers.

The key metaphors of the book appear in the title: mirrors and windows. These metaphors may have different interpretations. This reviewer's instinctive understanding was that it refers to language learning. There is an adage in Hungary, which claims that a person is worth as many people as many foreign languages they can speak. This adage can be understood to mean that a speaker of a foreign language must also become familiar with the mindset of the target language community, and develop empathy towards them. Thus mastering foreign languages opens up windows for us, widens our horizons, helps us to learn about the world beyond our immediate environment. At the same time, just as we discover the intricacies of our own language while learning a foreign language, seeing our own culture through the eyes of a foreigner helps us to better understand it, helps us to form a more objective self-image. Opening windows on the world and teaching students to perceive their own culture through the mirror of the 'Other' can be regarded as the noblest aims of language teaching, and educating language teachers who can accomplish this task can be regarded as the most elevated mission of language teacher education. The author herself used these powerful metaphors to invite her readers, mostly fellow professionals, to look into the mirror and examine their personal theories of teaching and reflect on their professional practice, and, at the same time, look out of the window to see how their field of expertise has evolved over the past decades.

The book revolves around two key concepts: intercultural competence and reform pedagogy. Intercultural competence is a relatively new one even in applied linguistics or language pedagogy. The concept of communicative competence, coined by Hymes (1972), has become widely accepted and further elaborated on by applied linguists and language pedagogues alike. However, the fact that communication has a cultural dimension upon which the effectiveness and appropriacy of human communication hinges first gained salience in Byram's model, which was described in his book 'Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence' in 1997. Since then the concept has changed enormously. In Byram's 1997 model intercultural meant inter-cultural, i.e. communication between the native speaker members of the target language community and learners of the target language, who come from another cultural community. With the emergence of a globalized world in the decades following the end of the

Cold War, English has turned more and more into a means of intercultural communication between members of communities neither of which has English as its native tongue. Clearly, this is a new situation, which requires developing a new kind of intercultural competence. The challenge posed primarily to the English language teaching profession is tremendous. The book elaborates on what the challenge itself means, how it could be met and what has been achieved so far in both the international and the Hungarian context.

The other central concept of the book is reform pedagogy, which started to evolve in Europe and the US from the second half of the 19th century. Today reform pedagogy has a number of approaches and understandings, but it is most closely associated with learner-centeredness, active learner participation, cooperation and reflection. The author makes the claim that the activities designed along these principles can be used to effectively nurture intercultural competence both in language teacher education and in foreign language classrooms. If intercultural competence is the ‘WHAT’, the competence that should be nurtured in pupils in classrooms and their future teachers in training rooms, then reform pedagogy answers the question of ‘HOW’ this task could be best performed.

The fairly thin volume is surprisingly informative and rich in data. It is divided into three parts; each part is then further divided into three chapters. The first part of the book discusses the theoretical background of the volume. Its first chapter focuses on the concepts of culture, identity and intercultural competence. The concept of culture in and of itself is extremely complex; furthermore, it is inextricably and intimately intertwined with language. Both culture and language are bound up with the individual’s identity, which, in the author’s interpretation, is always complex, multi-layered, and dynamic, as the individual is conceptualized as standing at the crossing point of different group cultures, which are themselves constantly evolving over time. Intercultural encounters are the meetings of such individuals in our rapidly globalizing world, often in multicultural classrooms. To make such intercultural encounters a success calls for interculturally competent speakers. The interculturally competent speaker is defined as someone who ‘has the knowledge of one, or preferably, more cultures and social identities, and has the capacity to discover and relate to new people from other contexts for which they have not been prepared directly’ (Byram & Fleming, 1998, p. 9, cited in Lázár, p. 20.)

Clearly, the foreign language used in most of such intercultural encounters is not the native tongue of either speaker. Therefore, teaching the target language with the aim of achieving native speaker proficiency coupled with mastering the cultural norms and standards of the target language community can no longer be the legitimate aim of foreign language education, especially of English language education. This change not only necessitates giving up pursuing native level proficiency in the target language, which has proved to be elusive for most learners, anyway, but changing the approach to culture teaching completely as well. Culture teaching so far has been limited to teaching some elements of the achievement culture of the target language community in the foreign language classroom, for example some information about its sights, heroes, history etc. Instead, what is required now is teaching norms and standards of behaviour and communication, NOT limited to the target language culture. The rationale behind this change is that the more varied repertoire of cultural norms and standards one is familiar with, the more easily and successfully one can participate in an intercultural encounter. Even more importantly, the new approach to culture teaching calls for the nurturing of certain attitudes, like open-mindedness, tolerance of ambiguity, patience, flexibility, which are indispensable when interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Developing intercultural competence is not a stand-alone competence, though. It is one of the many new competences the 21st century calls for, as it is spelt out in the second chapter of the first part. The intercultural dimension is present in the teaching of various school subjects, not only in language education, within or together with the development of *global competence* (p. 27). Preparing pupils to operate successfully and actively in a democratic society, that is to develop their *democratic competence* also has its intercultural dimension. Developing competences for democracy and for global citizenship also necessitates changes in education. It can only take place successfully in a democratic classroom, where teachers' and learners' roles and relationships change profoundly. These changes manifest themselves in educators' teaching and assessment practices, and can only be initiated by those in power position in the classroom: teachers themselves. This is why teacher education is the starting point of the transformation of education. It is the task of teacher education to familiarize trainees with the 21st century goals of education, with teachers' new roles, and the practices they can use in their future classrooms to achieve these goals. The last chapter of the first part summar-

izes those approaches and activities that can be used in the classroom to achieve the ambitious goal of educating the intercultural competent speaker, who can actively participate in a sustainable and democratic global society. These practices and activities stem from what is known in education as reform pedagogy. Hence the author's double focus: intercultural competence and reform pedagogy. The latter is regarded as the appropriate means to achieve the goal of intercultural competence development.

After clarifying the theoretical background, in the second part of the book the author sets out to provide an overview of where putting the above outlined theory into practice stands in the international and the Hungarian context. To achieve this goal, she firstly scrutinizes policy documents, education acts on foreign language education internationally and domestically alike, looking for changes adopted to promote intercultural competence development and the methods and practices of reform pedagogy. The review reveals the increasing importance attached to the development of intercultural competence internationally. Scrutinizing the different versions of the Hungarian National Core Curriculum (Government of Hungary, 1996, 2005, 2012, 2020) published since the regime change shows that education for democratic citizenship and intercultural communication does feature in each version, although with varying understandings and emphasis. Closely connected to the previous topic, the policy documents and acts regulating teacher education in both the international, mainly European, and the Hungarian contexts are reviewed, to see whether teacher education is in line with the changes adopted in language education. The documents reviewed in both contexts show that teacher education is increasingly focusing on the development of trainees' competences, among them their intercultural competence as well as on adopting the principles, approaches, practices and activities of reform pedagogy.

While the policy documents seem to show that there has been a steady progress, both in language education and language teacher education in the last decades, the overview of the empirical research in the second chapter of the second part of the book is less encouraging. The aim of the chapter is to see how the reforms delineated in policy papers and educational acts have impacted on the realities of language teaching and language teacher education internationally and domestically. Most studies reviewed find that teachers' beliefs and practices have not changed in line with the evolving theory and the policy documents. Although teachers are open to nurturing their pupils' intercultural competence, their first

priority is developing their language skills. One of the most important reasons behind teachers' reluctance to engage in developing intercultural competence is their lack of training in this regard. This points to the need of updating pre-service and in-service teacher education to fill this gap in teachers' expertise. The review of the Hungarian scene shows similar tendencies. It seems that learner-centred, reform pedagogy-oriented practices and methods have gained ground, not only in language education but in teaching other subjects as well. (p. 107.) However, teachers find it difficult to include the intercultural dimension into their lessons, for mostly the same reasons as their peers internationally. There is improvement, though: the intercultural dimension is now getting increasingly integrated into the courses of foreign language teacher education in Hungary, so there is hope that future language teachers will take on this mission.

Finally, the last chapter of the 2nd part is a report on on-going research on intercultural education and reform pedagogy in Hungary. The participants of the first project are teachers who participated in a Cooperative Learning workshop designed and facilitated by the author. The research aims to map the change in participants' beliefs and practice regarding the potential of cooperative methods. A second on-going study is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers to elicit the self-reported changes in their beliefs about teaching during their career. Both studies are to be continued, with a second round of interviews to see if the participants' beliefs and teaching practices have changed in the wake of the first cycle of research.

The third chapter of the second part forms a bridge to the third part of the book, which presents the reprints of the author's three earlier publications. All three articles focus on her research work, and although they have already been published in English abroad, they may be new and of interest for the Hungarian teacher educator community. The first is a report on a project carried out in four groups of language learners in four countries, with a view to developing the learners' intercultural competence. The second presents a self-assessment tool, developed by a group of professionals and edited by the author, which can be used to assess one's own intercultural competence. This seems to be a useful tool for language learners, teachers and teacher educators alike to nurture their self-assessment skills, their self-awareness, as well as their reflective thinking skills. The third article maybe the most appealing to teacher educators: it is a case study, exploring the belief changes of two trainee teachers after attending a course designed to foster their intercultural

tural competence as well as observing their lessons to see to what extent the belief changes were followed by changes in their classroom practice. All the three articles, and the on-going research project presented in the third chapter of the second part reveal a teacher educator who lives up to her principles: theory and practice are inextricably intertwined in her work.

The content of the book is further enriched by some special features. To start with, the author aims to establish a rapport with her readers by including a set of potential research questions, reflective questions and tasks at the beginning of each chapter: one set for potential researchers, one set for teacher educators, and one for interested trainee teachers. These well-thought through reflection inducing questions and tasks help the readers to connect to the content of the upcoming chapter. At the end of each chapter, a set of reflective questions invite the readers to re-consider the content of the chapter for themselves, and connect the ideas to their personal theories of teaching and/or teacher education and their practice. Apart from these features, there are some welcome extras in the Appendices. Namely, a lesson observation schedule and a set of coursebook evaluation criteria. Both these documents feature a set of criteria for general observation and coursebook evaluation and a separate set of criteria for observing or evaluating those features of a lesson or of a coursebook which help nurturing the intercultural competence of learners.

The book is a straightforward and streamlined discussion of what culture teaching and developing the intercultural competence of teachers and pupils mean in the first decades of the 21st century and how these aims can be best achieved by adopting the methods of reform pedagogy. It is admittedly rooted in a worldview which regards multiculturalism and multilingualism as the norm of all contemporary societies, and rearing global citizens who are capable of working towards a democratic society and a sustainable future anywhere in the world as the principal aim of 21st century education. Clearly, not everybody shares this worldview or accepts these aims as the first priorities of education. It is enough to look at the 2020 National Core Curriculum of Hungary (Government of Hungary, 2020). The author herself indicates that it ‘...seems to put more emphasis on developing the learners’ national and European identity...’(p. 74) than on developing their intercultural competence as it is understood by her. However, she admits that it does highlight the aim of ‘acquiring knowledge and understanding of cultural differences and developing attitudes of curiosity and acceptance (p. 74). She

also points out that the word intercultural is not defined in the document, and is often used to refer to the target language culture and civilization. One can safely assume that the 2020 National Core Curriculum (Government of Hungary, 2020) is based on a different worldview, hence all the differences. However, it is not only policy-makers who seem to hold different assumptions about what the cultural dimension of foreign language teaching and foreign language teacher education should involve, or what interculturality may mean. It seems some fellow academics are not convinced, either. One program manager at a Hungarian University is cited to be of the following opinion:

'Interculturality and intercultural education are buzzwords; they are devoid of any real meaning. Many get on this bandwagon to sell their ideas. Interculturality has nothing to do with ELT or teacher training. It is another dimension. Developing the acceptance of difference and the rejection of hate speech are part of the socialization process, and the domains responsible are the family, churches, schools and beyond.' (Holló, 2017, cited in Lázár, 2020, p. 110.)

There are a number of other references in the book (p. 103) that show there are academics who not only deny the importance of the intercultural dimension in language teaching and language teacher education but also question the academic status of educational linguists and language educators. Given that clearly there are controversies among academics regarding interculturality and intercultural competence, it would be interesting to hear about the contentious points, about the arguments raised by both camps. The author refrains from presenting these. However, she convincingly presents the theory, arguments and positions of one party, supported by document analysis and empirical research. Thus this book could be a welcome starter of a professional dialogue over the relevance and thus the place of the intercultural dimension in language teaching and language teacher education, as well as over the place of reform pedagogy in higher education, especially in teacher education. It is high time that all academics – disciplinary professors included – who are involved in teacher education engaged in a meaningful dialogue about how to best educate future professionals, and listened carefully and respectfully to the arguments of the other camp, as it is befitting interculturally competent speakers.

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